



## Rattlesnake Safety

### How can I recognize a rattlesnake?

Rattlesnakes are part of the natural environment of Yosemite. The primary prey of adult rattlesnakes is California ground squirrels, with smaller snakes eating smaller mammals. Their interaction with other species makes them an important component of the park's ecosystem. Rattlesnakes are found in a variety of habitat types up to about 9,000 feet elevation, usually near cover, such as rocks, logs, and woodpiles. Yosemite contains just one species of rattlesnake, the western rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*). Rattlesnakes should not be killed unless they present an immediate danger to people. The Western Rattlesnake has a triangular head, narrow neck, is brown to brownish gray in color, and is 2-4 feet long.



### How can I avoid rattlesnakes?

Approximately 8,000 people a year receive venomous snakebites in the U.S., but only about 9-15 victims die from snakebites. Actually, 25% of adult rattlesnake bites are dry, with no venom injected. Rattlesnakes can only strike a distance equal to 1/2 their own length so keeping your distance is the best thing you can do to avoid a rattlesnake bite. Most bites occur when the snakes feel threatened by people approaching too closely or attempting to handle or move them.

- Walk or hike in areas where the ground is clear, so you can see where you step or reach with your hands.
- If you think you hear a rattlesnake, stand still until you've located the snake, then move away.
- Don't rely on hearing a rattle – baby rattlesnakes don't have a rattle but are just as venomous and adult snakes' rattles can break off.
- Wear protective clothing such as long heavy pants and high boots.
- Wear gloves when using your hands to move rocks or brush.
- Watch where you step, and never put your hands in areas where you cannot see.
- Ledges, cracks or holes are common areas where rattlesnakes can be found resting.

### What are the symptoms of a rattlesnake bite?

- One or two puncture marks
- Pain, tingling or burning at the area of the bite
- Swelling at the area of the bite
- Bruising and discoloration at the site of the bite
- Numbness
- Nausea, weakness and lightheadedness.

## What first aid should be given for a snakebite?

**All rattlesnake bites are a medical emergency. Victims should seek medical attention in an emergency room immediately!**

Initial treatment is relatively simple:

- Try to calm the victim
- Immobilize and gently wash the bite area with soap and water and keep it lower than the heart
- Remove any watches, rings, etc. which may constrict swelling
- Apply a cold, wet cloth over the bite if possible
- Transport safely to the nearest emergency facility for further treatment
- If a victim is unable to reach medical care within 30 minutes, a bandage, wrapped two to four inches above the bite, may help slow venom. The bandage should not cut off blood flow from a vein or artery. A good rule of thumb is to make the band loose enough that a finger can slip under it.
- A suction device (not your mouth) may be placed over the bite to help draw venom out of the wound without making cuts. Suction instruments often are included in commercial snakebite kits.

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## What should I avoid if bitten by a snake?

There are several things you should NOT do if bitten by a snake:

- **DON'T** apply a tourniquet
- **DON'T** pack the bite area in ice or ice water
- **DON'T** cut the wound with a knife or razor
- **DON'T** suck out the venom by mouth as infection can occur
- **DON'T** let the victim drink alcohol

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## Who can I contact about rattlesnakes in Yosemite?

If you encounter a rattlesnake in a developed area, where someone may unknowingly get too close to it, call the park's Emergency Command Center (209/379-1992), or Yosemite Wildlife Management (209/372-0476).